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DEPARTMENT FOR S/ES-CR, S/ES-O, FOR AF/FO, AF/EX AND AF/W

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SUBJECT: CAPE VERDEAN PM REQUESTS PRESIDENT OBAMA'S SUPPORT OF CIDADE VELHA AS UNESCO'S WORLD HERITAGE

1. (U) Post received a letter from Cape Verdean Prime Minister Jose Maria Pereira Neves to President Obama, dated June 10. The original letter, which was received yesterday June 15, will be sent via diplomatic pouch to S/ES-CR. Text as follows:

Begin Text

Praia, June 10, 2009

Excellency,

Cape Verde is the result of the mixture of cultures between Africans and Europeans, dating back to the 15th Century. Later, the "Crioulism" resulting from this first miscegenation, entails a great capacity for dialogue and tolerance in its genetic code; this was and is still being strengthened by the planet's rich cultural diversity, particularly through the Capeverdean Diaspora scattered throughout the world and our country's conscientious and humanistic values.

The City of Santiago of Cabo Verde, most commonly known as "Cidade Velha" (The Old City) is the birthplace of the Capeverdean Nation; it is where it all began. In fact, "Cidade Velha" was not only the anthropological and environmental laboratory of the Capeverdean world but it was also the bridge linking four continents and two oceans: Africa, Europe, Americas and Asia, as well as the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. During the International Meeting on "Cidade Velha - o Futuro do Passado" (The Old City - the Future of the Past) held in October 2007, held in the ancient and renovated San Francisco Convent, historians and scientists from over sixteen countries at the event concluded that the Atlantic world, in its cultural, social, historical, environmental, political and economic aspects still has an enormous complicity with the Old City. To support their conclusion, they pointed to several facts: Cidade Velha served as an experimental laboratory of human, animal and vegetal species that were later shipped to the Atlantic world; it was the first slave trade center in the world; it was the first city established by the Europeans in Africa; and it was a mandatory port of call for water and food supply for all navigations to and from the African, American and Asian continents in the 15th 16th and 17th Centuries.

Cidade Velha is renowned for having hosted important vessels such as those belonging to Antonio da Noli and Diogo Gomes, Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama, among others. It was also an important mark in the division of the world discovered by the Portuguese and Spaniards, through the Treaty of Tordesillas. "Cidade Velha" also preserved the historical and cultural traces of the African continent, Portugal and Spain, both in terms of intangible culture and of various military, religious and civil monuments, some which are in ruins, and others rehabilitated. Importantly, it was the soil that produced and informed the oldest "crioulo" culture (the mixed language and the people) in the world.

For all the above and also because it is a "space of memory", which houses the oldest Cathedral in south of the Sahara Africa; for having attracted the attention of several European corsairs, particularly the English, French and Dutch during the early period of their development (in the 16th and 17th Centuries) based on a slavery economy; for maintaining intact the Royal Fort of Sao Filipe and various other forts in ruins, which bear

witness to the Spanish domination over the City and their entrenched defense system in the 16th and 17th Centuries; for still maintaining in good state the Pillory, a remembrance of the hardship and horrors of the slavery period, Cidade Velha maintains a unique position in history.

For all this - but above all for having been the birthplace of a new anthropology, resulting from the interbreeding of various peoples and various ecologies since the 15th Century and incorporated in what today we call the Capeverdean Nation, "Cidade Velha" is already a World Heritage. The formal acknowledgement and recognition of this status by the international Community, through the verdict to be decided by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, would greatly allow us to preserve this unique heritage that belongs to all mankind.

Our candidacy was prepared by a Capeverdean technical commission, with assistance from UNESCO itself, and was submitted to the World Heritage Committee on January 28, 2008. In July 2008, UNESCO sent a mission to Cape Verde to assess the candidacy and the World Heritage Committee will announce its decision to the month of June 2009.

Our nation would be very grateful and would like to count on your support and that of your Government. The support from your country and Government will certainly be very helpful and much appreciated.

Hence, we are looking forward to your valuable collaboration.

Kindly accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration and esteem.

//s//

Josi Maria Pereira Neves
Prime Minister Republic of Cape Verde

END TEXT

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